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ABSTRACT

Community service programs of rural community colleges can assist in rural development. Currently some programs focus on educational service to individuals or groups, while others are more direct community development projects. The following trends are indicative of the emergence of the human resources development role in the community college: (1) increased monitoring of curricular offerings; (2) increased emphasis on constituency development (e.g., women, older persons, union members, and handicapped persons); (3) changing view of student as consumer; (4) emphasis on community needs assessment; (5) increased liaison between the college and the work world; (6) expansion of continuing education for employment; (7) expansion of non-classroom instruction; (8) increased liaison with community agencies and resources; (9) movement toward student services such as life planning and assessment, adult support groups, and child care services; and (10) increased emphasis on institutional development. Other considerations include human resource development and the focus on the part-time adult student. A list of questions are presented to help the local community college administrator determine whether local policies and practices support the rural development role of the college. (MB)

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A ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

In spite of the fact that the majority of community colleges in the United States today may be classified as small and serve rural towns and areas, the rural scene is little understood by leaders in the educational field. Just as Michael Harrington labeled low-income persons in rural areas "the invisible poor," so also the rural community college has been the "invisible partner" in educational circles.

The result has been that federal and state programs that tend to be addressed to the urban scene, and then passed on to rural colleges without due regard for the unique needs and circumstances of the countryside. As compared to the urban setting, serving the poor in the "spread-out ghetto" of the rural area is different in many ways beyond the mere question of numbers. Serving women, older persons, professionals, union members, or any other constituency group in the small town and rural area requires unique linkages with these groups, and unique approaches to instructional services. Programs cooked up by a national task force for urban or suburban colleges and then warmed over for rural colleges have little chance for success or impact.

Despite considerable difficulty in getting the attention of national and state level thought leaders and decision makers, rural community colleges do play a major role in the communities and areas they serve. Often the community college serves social roles that more specialized agencies might play in the city. The rural community college might provide public library services, serve as a local civic center, provide the community theatre, or serve as a small business management institute for the area.

Community Services Programs

The community service programs of the rural community college provide a delivery system by which the college can assist in rural development. Some programs focus on educational service to individuals or groups, while others are more direct community development projects. Short courses or workshops are offered in areas such as real estate, outdoor camping, child care, home management, in-service training for nurses, automotive mechanics, diesel equipment repairs, fruit processing, lumber grading, plumbing code review, electrical code review, and family recreation. Often these programs are developed in cooperation with area churches, public schools, business and industrial firms, Department of Social Services, Cooperative Extension Service, or other agencies.

Close linkages with other agencies or groups in the community are required when the community college provides leadership in such community development projects as conducting community needs analyses, providing in-service seminars for newly elected public officials, preparing a community agency directory, organizing a volunteer group to transport handicapped citizens, offering community development seminars to community leaders, or forming a community interagency council.

These are all examples of recent activities of community colleges which could be characterized as rural development. Clearly these activities symbolize a grass roots educational institution which can function on the street corner and in the farmyard as well as in the classroom. These colleges have developed skills to cope with service to sparsely-populated areas. They value small programs and know the worth of informal as well as formal approaches to instruction.

A description of the rural development role of the community college would be incomplete, however, if only specific community service programs

were examined, many rural community college leaders view the entire college as a community service agency. One small Michigan community college includes the words "Community Service" on its official college seal. This college jointly operates a community child care center with other agencies, and offers specific manpower programs to assist area communities in promoting economic development. An Alabama community college was instrumental in reviving nearly lost mountain crafts, and, through business management and crafts programs for local citizens, is adding to the area's economic base.

Rural Development

No matter what opportunities or problems may exist in a rural area (and there are many variations in the character of what we generally call "a rural area"), the community college is likely to offer only one element of a full response. Harold Hodgkinson, in a 1976 speech, suggested that we think of educational institutions as one part of a system of integrated services:

We are about a decade behind many European countries in thinking about education as part of a system of integrated community services... So as we think about community services and how education fits in, we seem to have a lot of rethinking to do. One of the prime questions is the relationship between education and other factors of life, including health, nutrition, and psychological well-being.

Edmund Gleazer speaks of the community college as a community-based educational institution. He uses the analogy of the railroads, which made the mistake of thinking they were in the railroad business when in fact they were in the transportation business. Similarly, community colleges may think to their peril that they are in the classroom business, when in fact they are in the human resource development business.

A Shifting Orientation

Many trends do point to a major shift in the orientation of community colleges from the traditional collegiate model to a human resource development model. It is quite likely that the late 1970's will represent the end of one era for community college development and the beginning of a new era. The following trends signal the emergence of the human resources development era of the 1980's:

1. Increased Monitoring of Curricular Offerings: Emphasis on competencies and the specific outcomes of learning, mandated followup studies of graduates and noncompleters, etc.
2. Increased Emphasis on Constituency Development: Services designed for women, older persons, union members, handicapped persons, and other constituency groups as the part-time adult becomes the typical community college student.
3. Changing View of Student as Consumer: Movement toward a view of the student as a consumer having a right to a specific learning "product" and specific learning outcomes.
4. Increased Emphasis on Community Needs Assessment: Stronger effort to study the educational needs of diverse community groups, including interactive approaches which involve community group representatives in the planning process..
5. Increased Liaison between the Community College and the World of Work: The development of work/education councils, stronger advisory committee structures, more use of work-study arrangements and other types of experiential learning.
6. Expansion of Continuing Education for Employment: Emergence of mandated in-service programs in health and other fields, greater expectation by employers that job candidates have a record of occupational continuing education.

7. Expansion of Nonclassroom Instruction: Development of nonclassroom instructional approaches such as neighborhood study groups, courses by newspaper, community forums, internships, etc.
8. Increased Liaison with Community Agencies and Resources: Increased linkage with community education programs, universities, Social Service agencies, Cooperative Extension services, etc.
9. Changing Role of Student Services: Movement toward student services such as life planning and assessment, adult support groups, group career counseling, child care service, etc.
10. Increased Emphasis on Institutional Development: Creation of development offices to conduct studies and explore the feasibility of program change or addition, and to provide staff development services which keep the skills of the college staff current.

Human Resources and Rural Development

The trends listed above are moving rural community colleges toward a human resources model and away from the traditional collegiate model. As the college plays its community role in human resource development, it will interact with other segments of the community social system. It will interact, for example, with the business community as it carries out its social role of economic development, the churches as they carry out their role of moral leadership, and governmental units as they can carry out their role of providing basic human services. Community service programs of the community college--short courses, workshops, community action activities--can serve as the "boundary redefiner" or cutting edge of this interaction, but ultimately all other functions of the college--occupational education, general education, developmental education and student services--must be involved. It is in these areas that rapid change in program structures and priorities are taking place today. The community services philosophy is rapidly pervading the college as a whole.

The Adult Student

The most visible and obvious evidence of transition to a human resource development model is the rapid change in student composition in the small/rural community college. While community services has always served basically an adult clientele, now the part-time adult student is becoming the typical student for the entire college. As students move in and out of educational experiences as a natural part of their daily lives, a new version of universal higher education is being forged. It is universal not in the sense that more students enter to work toward degrees, but rather in the sense that community college education moves horizontally through the social structure to address a wider variety of human needs. The college can play a human development role in many adult life role areas, including work, family life, citizenship, and recreation.

Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicates how rapidly the adult learner has moved into the higher education sphere. Between 1969 and 1975, there was a 13% increase in adults in the general population, but an increase of 31% in adults participating in some form of education. During approximately this period, the number of colleges offering programs designed for adults doubled. While adult needs for lifelong learning are expected to grow, the Center predicts a 22% decrease in college attendance by 1990 from the 17-21 year-old group.

The majority of the policy considerations in the community services area must be attended to at the local level, although some very critical ones must be addressed at the state and national level. The policy issues are so complex and interwoven that there is a definite need for a national institute, perhaps sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and HEW in cooperation with AACJC, to study the unique needs of the small/rural community college and the

communities they serve. A similar focus has been developed in the past for student groups such as women, union members, minority groups, and older persons. The initiative for the development of such an institute could be taken by AACJC.

At the state and federal levels, policy issues include head count as well as ADA or FTE funding, special "point of service" funding structures which recognize the cost of service in sparsely populated areas, direct grants for community development projects, and increased funding for community services.

At the local level, policy issues include the location of services, framework for community needs assessment, processes for setting priorities for community development activities, framework for joint planning with community groups and agencies, marketing strategies, and long range planning strategies.

There is great potential for rural development in a partnership between the small/rural community college and other service agencies. However, the policy issues outlined above must be studied and addressed before that potential can be reached.

Post-Test

Policy development, like charity, starts at home. It is easy to blame state and national agencies for inaction while neglecting change strategies at the local level. The twelve questions below are intended to help the local community college administrator in determining whether local policies and practices support the rural development role of the college.

1. Do you have a systematic approach to determining the location of services and use of facilities throughout your district?
2. Are you and your staff truly knowledgeable about people and problems in the area you serve?

3. Do you have a systematic approach to the assessment of community needs in your service area?
4. Do you annually determine priorities as to your response to community needs?
5. Do you have an organized approach to joint planning with other educational agencies in your service area?
6. Do you truly view the college as a partner with other community agencies in providing educational services?
7. Do you have well-established linkages with other community agencies?
8. Do you have a comprehensive plan for marketing community college service in your service area?
9. Do you have well-established linkages with community groups such as women, older persons, handicapped persons, union members and professional persons?
10. Do you have a well-articulated plan for integrating community services into your total college operation?
11. Do you have a systematic approach to reviewing college programs and services in relation to the needs of the adult learner?
12. Is an approach to identifying community needs and establishing relations with community agencies and groups included in your long range planning?

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